

CANINE-CRANE CREEK FENCE
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA OR-025-00-25

Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
HC 74-12533 Hwy 20 West
Hines, OR 97738

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I. INTRODUCTION

The proposed action consists of two parts: 1) A fence in T. 26. S., R.35 E., Section 2, going west to east and splitting the Coyote Creek Allotment into two pastures, North and South. The Crane Creek riparian zone would be enclosed within the South Pasture; and 2) An authorization of 196 AUMs of Temporary Non-Renewable (TNR) use in excess of permitted use in the Coyote Creek Allotment.

A. Purpose and Need

The fence project is needed to achieve adequate grazing use of the upland areas while preventing overgrazing of the riparian zones along Crane Creek and below Canine Spring. Currently, the uplands are receiving so little grazing use that wolf plants are common, and grass growth is being hindered by the buildup of old dead vegetation. Meanwhile, utilization in the riparian zones exceeds acceptable levels. Constructing the proposed fence would eliminate the need for a fence around the Canine Spring overflow because this overflow would be fenced into the new South Pasture along with Crane Creek. Thus, these riparian areas could be managed separately, and utilization standards could be followed without compromising upland objectives.

Utilization targets on the uplands are not fully meeting resource objectives. TNR use up to 196 AUMs, would allow higher levels of livestock use in the springtime when decadent upland forage can be managed with livestock. This level of use would be evaluated over the next 5-year period, as well as on an annual basis, to determine if this accomplishes upland vegetation management objectives for the allotment. Target utilization levels are 50 percent in the uplands. Areas currently receiving little or no use are becoming very decadent and infested with medusahead rye, a noxious weed. Springtime grazing at a level that stimulates plant growth and vigor of perennial species may cause those species to better compete with medusahead.

B. Conformance with Land Use Plans

The fence project, and the Canine Spring overflow fence, are both identified in the Coyote Creek Allotment Management Plan (AMP), approved September 28, 1995. Fencing off Crane Creek, was stated to be necessary if a new water source at the north end of the allotment was not successful in keeping cows out of the creek. It has now become apparent that the new water source has not been sufficient to lure the cows away from the creek in the fall. The proposed fence is necessary to meet the objectives of the AMP, particularly the objective of causing an upward trend in the riparian habitat condition along Crane Creek. The project is also consistent with the objectives of the Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (RMP) dated September 1992.

Authorizing TNR use is in conformance with the 1992 Three Rivers RMP, Section GM 1.2 (page 2-36) wherein it is stated that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will "...Establish an initial stocking level in the Resource Area ...Stocking levels will be reviewed and adjusted, if necessary and in accordance with the results of monitoring studies and allotment evaluations...."

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

A. Proposed Action

Proposed action 1) is to construct a 3-wire fence (bottom wire smooth), using green steel T-posts, for about three-quarter mile west to east across the Coyote Creek Allotment. The fence would tie into the existing enclosure at Canine Spring, leaving the trough on the north side of the fence and the overflow on the south side of the fence. Thus, the North Pasture would have water sources at its south end (Canine Spring) and its north end (private land at Little Crane Creek), and the South Pasture would contain the riparian zones. Fencing the allotment into a riparian and upland pasture would allow greater flexibility for applying grazing management actions specific to upland or riparian habitat. Access into the allotment is across Jerry Miller's private property. The proposed fenceline would not be bladed or scraped. If cultural resources or Special Status plants are found along the proposed fence, the fenceline would be relocated.

Proposed action 2) is to authorize up to 196 AUMs of TNR use in addition to the 124 AUMs of permitted use for the next 5 years in the Coyote Creek Allotment, as necessary on an annual basis to accomplish the resource objectives for the allotment. The majority of the use (approximately 300 AUMs) would occur during the spring (April), across the entire allotment. Later in the season, use would only be in the north end of the allotment. Medusahead control using herbicides would be done on a continued basis to control the small patches across the allotment.

B. Alternative 1 - Fence off the Creek, do not Increase Grazing

This alternative would be to fence off the creek in the same location but not allow for increased TNR use.

Alternative 2 - No Action

The no action alternative would be to not construct the fence and to continue with present grazing management and level of livestock use as outlined in the 1995 Coyote Creek AMP.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Vegetation

The vegetation along the fence route, and in the allotment, is primarily Wyoming and Basin big sagebrush and Basin wildrye, bluebunch wheatgrass, and Idaho fescue.

B. Soils

The soils are moderately deep, well-drained loams with moderate potential for erosion.

C. Wildlife

Mule deer and pronghorn antelope are in the area, as well as a variety of small mammals and birds, including sage grouse.

D. Threatened and Endangered Species

There are no known threatened or endangered species in the area. Sage grouse, a Special Status species, are likely to be present in the area. A site-specific botanical clearance would be completed prior to construction, at the Field Manager's discretion.

E. Cultural Resources

There are known sites in this area. A site-specific cultural clearance would be completed prior to fence construction. If sites are found along the proposed fenceline, the project would be relocated accordingly. If possible, sites near the spring would be fenced into the South Pasture.

F. Recreation

The only recreation known to occur in the project area is occasional use by hunters.

G. Visual Resources

The project is within a Class IV Visual Resource Management (VRM) zone (allows modification of the landscape character).

H. Invasive, Nonnative Species

Small patches of medusahead (Taenatherium caput-medusae) are present and expanding in this allotment but are not known to occur along the proposed fenceline.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

There would be no effect on floodplains, wetlands, prime farmlands, paleontological resources, areas with unique characteristics, ecologically critical areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, air or water quality nor on minority or low-income populations.

A. Vegetation

Proposed Actions: A small amount of upland vegetation would be displaced by construction of the fence. Riparian vegetation would benefit from the fence because the creation of the South Pasture would allow for shorter periods of grazing, lower levels of utilization in the riparian area, and no fall use. Upland vegetation may become more vigorous and competitive as a result of having more of the standing dry bunchgrasses grazed more uniformly to prevent development of wolf plants. Grazing in the entire allotment would take place April 1 to April 30. Use in the North Pasture would also include some light fall grazing.

Alternative 1: The riparian area would be enhanced due to better controlled livestock grazing later in the season (i.e., no livestock use in the riparian areas after the spring treatment). Upland vegetation would continue to receive the patchy, under-target use it has received over the past 8 years. Not only would medusahead continue to invade, but the perennial vegetation would be unable to compete with it.

No Action: Areas of nonuse would continue and bunchgrasses in these areas would keep deteriorating. Utilization would still be patchy across the allotment with some areas receiving too heavy of use and the majority not enough. The objective of improving the condition of the riparian zones while properly managing uplands would be much more difficult to achieve.

B. Soils

Proposed Actions: Some soil compaction or erosion may occur along the fence from cattle congregating and moving along it, especially near Canine Spring. This spring source is already fenced off from cattle, so the trough area would be the spot most affected.

Alternative 1: Some soil compaction or erosion may occur along the fence from cattle congregating and moving along the fence, especially near Canine Spring. This spring source is already fenced off from cattle, so the trough area would be the spot most affected.

No Action: There would be no additional impacts to soils.

C. Wildlife

Proposed Actions: A small chance exists that a few individual wild animals could be harmed or displaced by the fence, but the fence design is such that impacts to wildlife would be minimal, and their mobility would be unhindered. The greater protection for the riparian zones that would be afforded by the new fence would benefit most wildlife species. TNR use will remove more forage from the allotment which should provide more palatable mule deer spring forage. Since there will be no livestock in the allotment during the growing season, there would be no displacement of wildlife during that period. Fall use could adversely impact the bitterbrush which is an important forage resource for mule deer but the level of use in the fall should not put a lot of pressure on the bitterbrush.

Alternative 1: Same potential for fence hazards as outlined under proposed actions. Protection of riparian zones would be beneficial to wildlife species. Bitterbrush stands may be more adversely impacted due to grass competition reducing seedling establishment and some adverse impacts could occur from late season grazing but level of fall use should still be minimal. Upland herbaceous forage species would continue to become less productive and vigorous and offer less palatable feed and less cover for wildlife.

No Action: No additional fence hazards would be present for wildlife. No competition with mule deer for bitterbrush. No additional opportunities to precondition summer forage for mule deer.

D. Threatened or Endangered Species

Neither the proposed actions nor the alternatives would have any effect on threatened or endangered species.

E. Cultural Resources

Proposed Actions: Fencing usually results in negligible impact to archaeological sites. Post fencing impacts, especially near water sources, can be adverse and require mitigations such as avoidance or various data recovery techniques. TNR use would have no impact on archaeological sites.

Alternative 1: Same fencing-related potential problems as outlined above.

No Action: There would be no impacts to cultural resources.

F. Recreation

Neither the proposed actions nor the alternatives would have any impact on recreational activity.

G. Visual Resources

Proposed Actions: The visual impacts of the fence would be well within the VRM guidelines for a Class IV area.

Alternative 1: Same visual impacts as outlined above.

No Action: There would be no visual impact if the fence is not built.

H. Invasive, Nonnative Species

Proposed Actions: The construction of the fence and the presence of the fence are not likely to spread any of the existing medusahead infestations or to introduce any new weeds. The proposed fenceline and access to it are not in weed-infested areas, and ground disturbance from fence construction would be very minimal. TNR use should improve vigor and productivity in the native bunchgrasses which, in turn, would help them stay competitive with the medusahead. They should have more root zone vigor and produce more seed. This objective would be monitored to determine if the treatment is beneficial or not. Late season grazing in medusahead patches could spread weed seeds.

Alternative 1: The proposed fence has a negligible consequence in and of itself. The potential for more appropriate management by habitat should prove beneficial to the riparian habitat. Weed management opportunities in the uplands may not be as effective without opportunities for invigorating grazing treatments.

No Action: The existing weed situation would continue under the no action alternative, because the medusahead patches are already expanding in the allotment.

I. Cumulative Impacts

Proposed Action: The cumulative impacts of the proposed actions are greater flexibility to effectively manage riparian and upland vegetation which have different requirements to meet Standards for Rangeland health.

Alternative 1: Cumulative impacts are many of the same benefits described above, but reduced flexibility in vegetation management overall.

No Action: No action would continue the status quo with the inherent dilemma of managing for either riparian values or upland values but not both concurrently.

V. CONSULTATION WITH OTHERS

The proposed actions have been discussed at length with the permittee in the allotment, Jerry Miller.

VI. PREPARERS

Rudy Hefter, Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist
Craig Martell, Range Technician
Fred McDonald, Natural Resource Specialist
Lesley Richman, Range Management Specialist
James Sippel, Weed Coordinator
Fred Taylor, Wildlife Biologist
Nora Taylor, Botanist
Scott Thomas, Archaeologist

VII. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Location Map

USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Three Rivers Resource Area, Burns District
Hines, Oregon 97738

Finding of No Significant Impact
for
Canine-Crane Creek Fence
EA OR-025-2000-25

This proposal is in conformance with objectives and land use plan allocations in the 1992 Three Rivers Resource Management Plan (RMP).

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and all other information, I have determined that the proposal and alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not necessary and will not be prepared. This determination is based on the following factors:

1. Beneficial, adverse, direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts discussed in the EA have been disclosed. The physical and biological effects are limited to the Three Rivers Resource Area.
2. Public health and safety would not be adversely impacted.
3. There would be no adverse impacts to wetlands, floodplains, areas with unique characteristics or ecologically critical areas.
4. There are no highly controversial effects on the environment.
5. There are no effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. Sufficient information on risk is available based on information in the EA and other past actions of a similar nature.
6. This alternative does not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented in the future to meet the goals and objectives of the Three Rivers RMP, 1992.
7. No cumulative impacts related to other actions that would have a significant adverse impact were identified or are anticipated.
8. Based on previous and ongoing cultural resource surveys, and through the mitigation of avoidance, no adverse impacts to cultural resources were identified or anticipated.

9. No adverse impacts to any threatened or endangered species or their habitat that was determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act was identified. If at a future time there could be the potential for adverse impacts, guidelines or stipulations would be modified or mitigated not to have an adverse effect or a new analysis would be conducted.
10. This alternative is in compliance with relevant Federal, State, and local laws, regulations, and requirements for the protection of the environment.

Craig M. Hansen
Three Rivers Resource Area Field Manager

Date

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